

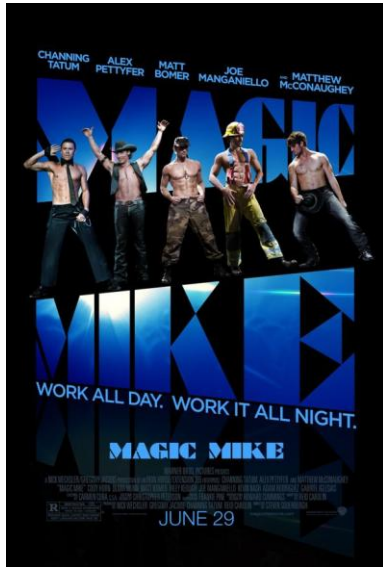
In theaters

“Magic Mike”

In Florida, male strippers earn their keep



By Capt. Tristan Hinderliter



When Channing Tatum was 19, he worked for a while as an exotic dancer in Tampa, Fla., going by the moniker “Chan Crawford,” and wow, does this dude have some moves. With a 6’1” frame and built like a linebacker, he moves with the grace and athleticism of a gymnast.

Tatum uses that background and body to full advantage in “Magic Mike,” a funny, serious film directed by Steven Soderbergh (who also directed Tatum in the 2011 mixed martial arts slugfest “Haywire”) based on a screenplay by Reid Carolin.

Soderbergh masterfully marshals the ripped abs and gyrating hips of a tremendous ensemble cast, including Matthew McConaughey, who is in top form here as Dallas, who manages (and performs at) the male strip club Xquisite in Tampa. Clad in nothing but black leather chaps, vest and cowboy hat, McConaughey has never been more charismatic on-screen (which is saying a lot).

He has five men working for him, Ken (Matt Bomer), Tarzan (Kevin Nash), Tito (Adam Rodriguez of “CSI: Miami”), and a gentleman played by Joe Manganiello whose “nom de strip,” as it were, I cannot repeat in this family-friendly newspaper.

But the superstar is Tatum, who goes by the nickname “Magic Mike.” Mike also works in construction, runs a mobile detailing service, and has dreams of opening his own custom-furniture store.

One day on the construction site, he meets Adam (Alex Pettyfer), a 19-year-old slacker who has just moved to Tampa to live with his sister, Brooke (Cody Horn). Adam gets fired his first day on the job when the foreman accuses him of stealing. His car won’t start, so Mike gives him a ride home.

The following evening, Adam is out in the bar district when he runs into Mike outside a club. Even though he is underdressed in jeans and a hoodie, Mike gets him in and puts him up to approaching a couple of girls standing at the bar. When he does, Mike swoops in to tell the girls he will be performing that night at Xquisite.

Adam, who has just learned of Mike’s other occupation, accompanies him to the club. Despite the fact that he is underage, Dallas agrees to pay him to help with the night’s show. When one of the regular performers overdoses, Adam is pushed out on stage in his place. It turns out “The Kid,” as he comes to be called, is a natural.

Over the next few weeks, Adam and Mike become friends, and Mike hits it off with Brooke. As Mike takes Adam under his wing, he shows him the ropes of stripping, takes him to parties and introduces him to women. Brooke isn’t happy with Adam’s new lifestyle, but Mike promises to take care of him.

When drugs are introduced into the equation, however, things take a bad turn. Ultimately, this film is more morality tale than buddy comedy movie, and in fact has some parallels to “Boogie Nights,” Paul Thomas Anderson’s magnificent 1997 movie set in California’s adult entertainment industry of the 1970s and 80s.

Soderberg, whose credits include the “Ocean’s Eleven” movies and “Traffic,” has experience directing charismatic actors in an ensemble cast, which he does superbly in this movie. And while Tatum and Pettyfur may not be Pitt and Clooney, “Magic Mike” definitely holds its own with the big boys.

Chan Crawford, I’m guessing, would be proud.

“Magic Mike” is rated R for sexuality and some violence.